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[Know This Before Supplementing](#)

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By Leisha Ferguson, Public Health Educator, Navy and Marine Corps Public Health Center

Dietary supplements are used by more than half of the adult population in the United States.¹ Supplement usage continues to be a very hot topic in our military community. Whether it's in the gym while working out or during

lunch break with your colleagues; the topic of supplements is bound to be discussed. In support of October's theme of Women's Health, I would like to shed some light on supplement safety.



A Marine reads the ingredients on the back of a dietary supplement sold in the Marine Corps Main Exchange aboard Marine Corps Base Camp Lejeune, June 8. News of a supplement containing an illegal drug was passed by commands aboard MCB Camp Lejeune and multiple Marine Corps installations across the country. (Photo by Lance Cpl. Nikki Phongsisattanak/ Released)

Many women consume dietary supplements for a variety of reasons. Supplements are used with the expectation of enhancing weight loss, optimizing health, preventing illness, increasing energy and sexual enhancement, and to self-treat an illness. Consumers obtain information on supplements from a variety of sources, such as health professionals and the media.

A dietary supplement is a product intended for ingestion that contains a “dietary ingredient” intended to add further nutritional value to supplement the diet. A “dietary ingredient” may be one, or any combination, of the following substances:²

- a vitamin
- a mineral
- an herb or other botanical
- an amino acid
- a dietary substance for use by people to supplement the diet by increasing the total dietary intake
- a concentrate, metabolite, constituent, or extract

Dietary supplements may be found in many forms, to include pills, capsules, powders, liquids, energy bars, energy drinks, and gels. Supplements do not have to go through the testing as that of prescription medications. Service members should use caution when consuming supplements and be aware of all listed ingredients in the supplements they chose to consume. The Food and Drug Administration (FDA) has received numerous reports of harm associated with some supplements, including stroke, liver injury, kidney failure, heart palpitations, and death. Consumers should be aware of these products and learn how to identify and avoid them.³

Some supplements may interfere with the action of prescription or over-the-counter medications you take, increasing their side effect or rendering them ineffective. One should make sure that their health care provider is aware of all supplements consumed.

At Navy and Marine Corps Public Health Center (NMCPHC), we’re here to help you learn more about the safety and usage of dietary supplements. Operation Supplement Safety (OPSS) is a joint initiative between the Human Performance Resource Center (HPRC) and DoD to educate service members, retirees, family members, leaders, healthcare providers, and DoD civilians about dietary supplements and how to choose wisely.

Food First. Supplement Second.

Reasons Dietary Supplements Shouldn't Be Your First Choice for Health and Wellness



DIETARY SUPPLEMENTS

ARE

ARE NOT

ARE NOT

Consumable products, such as liquids or tablets that contain a dietary ingredient (vitamins, minerals, herbs/botanicals, amino acids, enzymes, metabolites) intended to supplement the diet.

Replacements for healthy eating and physical training.

Treatment for a medical condition or a cure for an illness.

DID YOU KNOW?

Dietary supplements are a **HUGE** industry in the U.S.

Americans spend approximately **\$36.7 BILLION** per year on **SUPPLEMENTS**.

Wondering WHY People Spend So Much On Supplements?

They believe supplements may help them achieve a certain result.



Are you thinking about taking supplements? Follow the three steps below first.

The Food and Drug Administration (FDA) **DOES NOT STRICTLY REGULATE** dietary supplements.



Products may not always do what they claim to do or may be unsafe. Supplements are often unnecessary because the same components can be found naturally in foods to help you achieve the results you desire.

1. Choose Food Over Supplements.

When it comes down to it, eating smart and healthy will give your body the nutrients it needs to achieve the results you want. A few common supplements and food alternatives are provided here.

BCAA (Branched-Chain Amino Acids)

Quercetin

Omega-3 Fatty Acids

Creatine

Whey

What it Claims to Do?

- Enhance exercise performance
- Prevent fatigue
- Reduce muscle breakdown
- Improve recovery

- Act as an antioxidant and anti-inflammatory
- Prevent cancer
- Improve heart health

- Improve heart health
- May reduce the risk of some cancers, depression, and neurological disorders

- Enhance muscle building and increase "bulk"

- Decrease muscle break down (high in BCAA)

Eat This Instead

Cottage cheese, fish/seafood, meat/poultry, nuts/seeds, dry whole lentils

Berries, apples, onions, broccoli, kale, red wine, tea

Salmon, herring, mackerel, walnuts, canola, olive, flaxseed, and soybean oils

Lean meat, poultry, fish

Skim milk, cottage cheese, ricotta cheese, yogurt

For more information on nutrition and how to eat to achieve optimal performance, check out [Performance Nutrition 101](#).

2. Talk to Your Health Care Provider.

Always speak with a health care provider before taking a new supplement. Be prepared to talk about the following:



Existing conditions and medical history



Potential medication interactions



Dosing recommendations



Possible safety concerns



Food and exercise alternatives

3. BUY SMART.

Product claims may not always be 100% truthful. Do your research and seek information from trustworthy sources before you buy.

- Read the label.** Make sure the package has a label and it includes required information.
- Watch for false or misleading claims.** Labels like "natural" or "herbal" don't mean the supplement is safe or works.
- Know the risks.** There is no guarantee of quality, purity, safety, or effectiveness. [Consumer Supplement Safety \(CPSS\) High-Risk Supplement List](#) provides a list of high-risk supplements to avoid.

- Choose wisely.** Look for products with third-party verification programs, such as:
 - [United States Pharmacopoeial Convention \(USP\)](#)
 - [NSF International](#)
 - [Informa-Choice](#)
 - [Banned Substances Control Group](#)
 - [ConsumerLab.com](#)

- Be informed.** Just because a product is sold on a military installation does not mean it is a DoD-approved supplement. Check with your chain of command to determine if there is a local-level policy that impacts you and reference the following resources for more information about health, safety, and efficacy concerns:
 - [The Navy and Marine Corps Public Health Center \(NMCPHC\) Healthy Eating Web Page](#)
 - [NMCPHC How Safe are Dietary Supplements? Fact Sheet](#)
 - [NMCPHC How Healthy Are Dietary Supplements? Fact Sheet](#)
 - [Operation Supplement Safety](#)
 - [Human Performance Research Center \(HPRC\) Dietary Supplements Classification System](#)
 - [The Natural Medicines Comprehensive Database](#)
 - [National Institutes of Health \(NIH\) Office of Dietary Supplements Fact Sheets](#)



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PREVENTION AND PROTECTION START HERE

05/2019

(Graphic courtesy of Navy and Marine Corps Public Health Center)

Visit the following resources to learn more about safety and usage of dietary supplements you are taking or considering taking:

Navy and Marine Corps Public Health Center-Health Promotion

Human Performance Resource Center-Operation Supplement Safety

1. Bailey RL, et al. Why US Adults Use Dietary Supplements. JAMA Intern Med. 2013;4:1
<http://archinte.jamanetwork.com/article.aspx?articleid=1568520> Accessed September 12, 2016
2. U.S. Food and Drug Administration. What is a Dietary Supplement?
<http://www.fda.gov/AboutFDA/Transparency/Basics/ucm195635.htm> Accessed September 13, 2016
3. U.S. Food and Drug Administration. Beware of Fraudulent Dietary Supplements.
<http://www.fda.gov/ForConsumers/ConsumerUpdates/ucm246744.htm> Accessed September 13, 2016

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